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Congressional Record S. 20829-30 - 'A Letter from Vietnam'

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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United States
of America

House Proceedings of Today Are Published in Part; Additional
Proceedings Will Be Continued in the Next Issue of the Record

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 92^d CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 117

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1971

No. 191

Senate

The Senate met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. ELLENDER).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Edward L. R. Elson, D.D., offered the following prayer:

Thanks be to Thee, O God, for the need to work, for the will to work, for work to do and strength with which to do it. Give added energy to those who overwork, and respite to those so hard-driven that their work is unrewarding. Have compassion on those who seek work and find it not.

Send Thy grace in full measure on all who work in this place that they may have joy in work well done. And finally when our work is done, gather us like the magi and shepherds at the manger-crib, to share the blessedness of Thy great gift.

We pray in the name of the "Man for Others." Amen.

THE JOURNAL

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the Journal of the proceedings of Tuesday, December 7, 1971, be dispensed with.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE MEETINGS DURING SENATE SESSION

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all committees may be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate today.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

A LETTER FROM VIETNAM

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I am in receipt of "Season's Greetings from South Vietnam." I will not divulge the name of the individual who sent me this Christmas greeting, but he says; "We are still here. What are you doing about it?"

Mr. President, I have in my hand a copy of a letter from a group of U.S. medical officers in Vietnam. It is addressed to "Senators of the United

States." It is signed by some 50 commissioned members in the Medical Corps.

It is a straightforward and vivid statement of the predicament in which the policy of protracted withdrawal from Vietnam has placed these men and the soldiers of the armed services whom they are trying to help with their healing skills.

The situation which is described in the letter is, and I choose my words very advisedly, most shocking. It may be that this Government is now beyond shock insofar as Vietnam is concerned. This Senator is not and, I repeat, I am shocked by what I have read. In the evacuation hospital at which these U.S. medical officers are stationed, they write that most of the servicemen whom they treat are no longer casualties of military engagements; the majority are no longer victims of the opposing forces.

Where do they come from then? What reduces these men to casualties? Now, Mr. President, hear this:

(1) traumatic injuries mostly due to automobile accidents, self-inflicted wounds, or wounds sustained by infighting amongst our own troops; (2) infections due to continued exposure to the hazards of jungle tropics; and (3) drug-related casualties due to the use of heroin on a scale far wider than is commonly thought because of boredom, frustration, and want of an escape.

Most Americans who are sent to this hospital, in short, are dying or getting hurt or wrecking their lives in Vietnam without help from an enemy. They are doing so in consequence of the protracted with which we are removing ourselves from a conflict that is not now and has never been associated with the interests of this Nation.

For what, Mr. President, for what? Why do we delay the disengagement? What is the justification for asking these doctors and their patients—all of them Americans—to go on in this fashion? The doctors who wrote this letter from Vietnam have some ideas on that score and what they have to say does not make very pleasant reading. On the contrary, some of it makes very ugly reading.

I trust that the Members of the Senate, nevertheless, will read and heed what they have written. Indeed, this makes even a 6-month period for bringing this war to an end by negotiation seem an unpardonable delay. Yet, that time span,

as provided for in the Senate amendment to the foreign aid bill, which is now in conference, is being bitterly resisted in some quarters. It would be best, Mr. President, if some of the energy going into the resistance to the amendment on withdrawal from Vietnam were spent in devising ways to speed the withdrawal of all U.S. forces, to the end that we can get on with the proper business of this Nation.

Mr. President, I do not intend to disclose the names of the medical officers who signed this letter but so long as it is addressed to "Senators of the United States, Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C.," I am assuming that most Senators, if not all, have received a copy of this communication.

I, therefore, ask unanimous consent that the letter, without the signatures, be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the letter was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

SENATORS OF THE UNITED STATES,
Senate Office Building,
Washington, D.C.

DEAR SENATOR: We, the medical personnel at the 24th Evacuation Hospital in Long Binh and the Third Field Hospital in Saigon, Vietnam, wish to express our dismay and frustration over what seems to be quite an untenable situation here in Southeast Asia.

As we continue our efforts as physicians and U.S. citizens in Vietnam on a day to day basis we see little good coming from our endeavors to our servicemen, to our allies, or to the Vietnamese with whom we have contact when we look at our involvement in its entirety. The problems are multiple.

First, the majority of the medical problems are presently of three kinds: (1) traumatic mostly due to automobile accidents, self-inflicted wounds, or wounds sustained by infighting amongst our own troops; (2) infections due to continued exposure to the hazards of jungle tropics; and (3) drug related due to the use of heroin on a scale far wider than is commonly thought because of boredom, frustration, and want of an escape.

The reasons, then, for the temporary or permanent disabilities our patients sustain are not now a result of active military engagement but a result of a passive environmentally victimizing position. This we feel is an injustice to the American fighting man to be coerced into a situation that is devastating not because of military hostilities but because of the hazards his simple presence brings in this environment.

Secondly, the Vietnamese people with whom we have contact strongly feel the

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With utmost sincerity,